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SUBJECT: ROMANIA: CODEL LANTOS DISCUSSIONS WITH ROMANIAN
PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER, AND FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: DCM Mark A. Taplin for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary: In separate meetings with the Romanian President, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister August 31, Congressman Tom Lantos (D-California) expressed appreciation for Romania's military contributions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Balkans. He briefed on his recent visit to Lebanon, and thanked Romanian leaders for taking steps in changing the country's approach to Holocaust education. He underscored continuing concerns about the influence of hate groups and extremist right-wing parties in Romania and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. The Congressman also urged the Prime Minister to resolve pending issues including the acceptance of Nazi deportees from the United States. President Basescu explained his reasoning behind Romania's recent decision not to contribute troops to UNIFIL, saying he did not want to involve Romanian soldiers in Lebanon given the vague UNSCR mandate and ROE. He added, however, that he was open to reconsidering this decision if "expressly requested" by the international community. Prime Minister Tariceanu echoed the President, arguing that even with 15-30,000 troops in Lebanon, UNIFIL was unlikely to succeed absent tougher ROE and--more importantly--an overall political settlement including the concurrence of Hezbollah's "protectors" (Iran and Syria). Tariceanu did not respond directly to the Congressman's request to facilitate the acceptance of Nazi deportees. However, he commented that while his main task had been on assuring Romania's EU entry, he was now hoping to increasingly turn his attention to US-Romanian bilateral issues. End Summary

12. (C) Rep. Lantos prefaced his meeting with President Traian Basescu by expressing appreciation for Romania's military presence in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Western Balkans. He noted that in 2001, he had introduced a bill to make U.S. assistance to Lebanon contingent on the Lebanese army deploying on the border with Israel. Such a move might have prevented the recent war. He added that without a UNIFIL deployment to the Syrian border, Hezbollah would be resupplied by Syria, making a second war with Israel likely. President Basescu agreed that absent an effort to disarm Hezbollah and to cut off resupply from Iran and Syria, Hezbollah would continue to grow. He opined that Hezbollah was becoming an "angel" in the eyes of Arab populations, if not in the eyes of their leaders. Basescu said that he distrusted UNSCR 1558, adding that he and his advisors did not want to involve Romanian troops in disarming Hezbollah given the vague UNSCR mandate and ROE. Basescu also referred to recent television footage of a damaged UNIFIL compound adjacent to a site used by Hezbollah for launching rocket

attacks, underscoring that he was loathe to allow Romanian peacekeepers to encounter similar risks. He added, however, that he was open to reconsidering this decision if "expressly requested" to do so.

13. (C) Rep. Lantos also thanked the President for taking steps in changing Romania's approach to Holocaust education. Basescu replied that Romania continued to be very interested in the security of Israel, not least because a half million Jews of Romanian background lived there, but also because of growing economic ties between the two countries. Basescu agreed with Lantos' observation that relations between Romania and Hungary had improved greatly, adding he was delighted that Viktor Orban had lost the 2006 parliamentary election, and that he had even congratulated Orban for doing so. In response to a query about the popularity of Greater Romania Party (PRM) leader Vadim Tudor and the nationalist right, Basescu responded that Tudor's party consistently polled around 12-15 percent of the electorate. The President predicted that the new party of industrialist Gigi Becali could divide the extreme right in the future, ensuring that Tudor's vote would never rise beyond the 15 percent mark.

14. (SBU) Rep. Lantos also introduced two representatives of a business delegation accompanying Codel, Computer Based Solutions CEO Philip Friedman and IBM Vice President Thomas Conway. He noted that they were interested in opening a technology support center and software development center in Romania. Basescu promised to support efforts to promote U.S. investment, adding that he expected Romanian infrastructure to improve dramatically within five or six years after EU entry.

15. (C) Rep. Lantos raised similar themes during his meeting

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with Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu, praising Romanian support of U.S. efforts, including contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan. He said he hoped that Romania would recognize that Lebanon was not simply a U.S. responsibility, but one for the entire civilized world. Lantos also commended Romania for strengthening Holocaust education, and said he hoped that Romania's legislature would approve measures to allow former Nazis to be returned to Romania. Lantos said he was delighted to see Romania's enormous economic progress, adding that he was jealous of its 6 percent GDP growth. He noted the presence of the premier company from his congressional district--Oracle--in Romania and welcomed the growing interest of U.S. firms such as IBM in investing in Romania. Finally, Lantos said that he was following closely the growth of right-wing movements in the region.

16. (C) Prime Minister Tariceanu responded that Romania was concerned about the Lebanon situation and that it had an excellent relationship with Israel. In explaining Romanian reluctance to provide peacekeepers in Lebanon, he opined that even with 15,000 or even 30,000 troops, UNIFIL was unlikely to succeed absent tougher rules of engagement. Tariceanu also noted the importance of reaching an overall political solution in the Middle East, adding that this was where the European Union could play a more important role. The PM observed that it would be impossible to get Hezbollah to withdraw from its positions in South Lebanon without the concurrence of its "protectors"--Syria and Iran. Romania understood it had to share the burden in the region, he added, and was willing to contribute to peaceful solutions.

17. (C) Tariceanu evinced satisfaction with economic trends, noting that GDP growth may exceed 6 percent this year, with diminishing inflation. He said that the new flat tax had resulted in a 37 percent growth in government revenues. Unemployment had fallen to 5.1 percent. In closing, Tariceanu said that he had good news in terms of attracting foreign investment, noting that the way had been cleared for two leading U.S. car manufacturers to bid on a major

automotive plant in Craiova. While EU accession had been his main focus in recent months, the PM stressed, with EU entry on January 1, 2007 all but assured, he was now turning his attention to bilateral relations with the United States.

¶18. (C) In his session with Foreign Minister Mihai Razvan Ungureanu, Congressman Lantos discussed ethnic tensions and troubling ultra-nationalism in Romania and Lebanon. Lantos expressed his concern about xenophobic figures like Tudor and right nationalist soccer team owner Gigi Becali. At the same time, he applauded Romania for coming to grips with the past and moving forward on Holocaust issues. Striking a less optimistic note than FM Ungureanu about generational change, Lantos said he was troubled by the fact that Tudor and Becali were making inroads among the youth; governments, he stressed, have a responsibility to confront history. He encouraged Ungureanu to work closely with his Hungarian counterpart. He also asked Romania to support international efforts in Lebanon.

¶18. (C) Ungureanu said generally shared Lantos view on the "sheer hypocrisy" of European anti-Americanism, especially on the question of "secret renditions." So much of what was being said in Europe against the U.S. was coming from ideological quarters, while the Russian Federation sits back and gloats. It is sometime hard to determine who is worse. Ungureanu said, in any case Romania and the US are fighting in the same trenches against a non-traditional enemy, requiring non-traditional weapons. On the rise of ultra-nationalism, Ungureanu noted that there is no support in the countryside for this, but only among a segment of the "urban periphery." Ungureanu noted that he initiated the first Joint Parliamentary Assembly between Hungary and Romania, and knew that while the process is routine, the substance and the work is concrete.

¶19. Note: Codel Lantos did not see/clear this message prior to departing Bucharest.
Taubman